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# Home-school collaboration : an effective intervention for facilitating homework completion?

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## Abstract

This paper contains a review of literature on the utilization of home school collaboration as an intervention tool to improve the existing low homework completion rates of many students in our school systems. Due to the fact that homework is one of the most longstanding educational traditions, provides a natural link between the home and the school, and has been implicated as a tool for increasing overall rates of academic achievement, it is important to investigate past and present instruments and modes of assistance that involve both the home and school contexts in a shared partnership. There are a large variety of heterogeneous families and home environments throughout the nation in which our schools and school personnel interact with on a daily basis. This diversity creates an imperfect fit for any one sole intervention for all families. Therefore, this paper attempts to explore a wide variety of home school interventions that can be refined, altered, and applied to schoolchildren of all ages. Furthermore, in this paper, definitions of homework as well as its historical purpose in society will be touched upon. Theories, beliefs, and assumptions about homework are also considered. Finally, definitions of home school collaboration and a variety of prior home school interventions that have been employed in practice are described and assessed for their usefulness, practicality, and deficiencies.

# HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION:

# AN EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION FOR

# FACILITATING HOMEWORK COMPLETION?

An Abstract of a Master's Paper

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

If households and schools have always been interconnected in some way, it might be said that homework is the most important common element that has linked these two contexts together throughout the many years of formalized education. Although the overall efficacy of homework has been debated now for many years, Kralovec and Buell (2000) explain that homework is as much a part of life as is cutting the lawn or taking out the trash. Because of homework's obligatory status, schools and families should strive to work together in order to make the process of homework completion both less painful and more academically effective overall. The influence of utilizing home-school collaboration to facilitate homework completion may help to alleviate many of the problems or inadequacies that have been associated with this longstanding educational tradition. Therefore, it is necessary to further explore whether or not home-school collaboration is an effective or beneficial intervention for facilitating higher overall rates of homework completion.

Due to the fact that homework is generally seen as a take-home activity, it is commonplace to see other family members assisting students with their homework lessons (Cooper, 1989; Cooper, Jackson, Nye, and Lindsay, 2001). Although students spend a significant amount of time working on academic skills in the classroom on a weekly basis, they typically spend more of their overall time at home. Therefore, when teachers and other school personnel look for ways to improve homework completion rates, they generally look to the student's home environment for answers to this pedagogical problem. However, not all parents and guardians are able to help their

children with the homework completion process because of a variety of factors (Simon, 2001). In fact, Olympia, Jenson, Clark, and Sheridan (1992) explain that is a common occurrence, in our society, for parents and children to be frustrated and confused when sitting at the family dining table as they are trying to understand the homework that the child has been assigned. Consequently, schools must become increasingly committed to working closely with families so that their teamwork can result in increased shared knowledge, well understood expectations, and homework assignments that are significantly challenging and reasonable enough to be completed at the same time.

Parents or guardians and school personnel can work together to investigate the best possible methods for, and best possible environments to support efforts towards facilitating homework completion. For instance, parents or guardians may provide support to schoolchildren by furnishing them with a productive and adequate physical environment to complete homework assignments, delivering both positive and negative consequences for assignment completion, supervising the amount of time devoted to work completion, and providing signatures for completed homework assignments (Olympia, Jenson, & Hepworth-Neville, 1996). Additionally, teachers and parents or guardians can be specifically trained to work together to establish ideas in a number of areas such as in the organization of homework schedules, utilization of motivational strategies, and teaching and encouragement of self-management practices that all help to facilitate higher rates of homework completion (Olympia, Sheridan, & Jenson, 1994).

## Definition of Terms

--Collaboration:

A commitment to teamwork or an agreement to invest multi-contextual efforts and resources towards a common goal or purpose.

--Home-school collaboration:

An active partnership between the school and the home in which all parties believe and partake in a shared responsibility for students' educational outcomes (Christenson, 1995).

--Homework:

A task assigned within the classroom, by teachers, that is expected to be completed outside of the direct classroom setting.

--Homework completion:

The fulfillment of homework responsibilities as assigned to each student. However, one must keep in mind that completion can be defined based upon a different criterion for each individual teacher who has assigned the homework task(s), as well as for each individual student who is completing the task(s).

--Self-management:

Self-management typically involves the following elements: (a) self-evaluation, (b) self-reinforcement, (c) self-recording, and (d) self-instruction and goal setting (Callahan, Rademacher, & Hildreth, 1998).

# CHAPTER 2

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Homework has been an integral aspect of educating children and adolescents for many years. It is an educational activity that is assigned within the schoolhouse but is typically completed within the homes of most schoolchildren. Therefore, it may be thought of as one of the primary pedagogical activities that calls for a positive and strong connection between home and school. Although homework may be easily completed in some homes, it may be a task which is much more difficult and anxiety producing in others. In fact, many teachers report that not only do numerous children have difficulties completing their homework assignments accurately but there also are a considerable number of students who are not completing their homework assignments at all. Educators typically acknowledge that there is a problem when students are not able to accurately complete their assignments. However, it is clearly a concern when students do not have the necessary resources, do not take the time, or do not make the necessary efforts to complete their homework assignments at all.

Home-school collaboration has been investigated minimally as an aid in the homework completion process. Home-school collaboration is an attitude that is held by all available participants (e.g., school personnel, students, the parents or guardians of schoolchildren, etc.). Collaborators work together to share experiences and ideas, which can help to make home and school environments more congruent and more supportive of cross-contextual tasks like homework completion. The large degree of divergence found in familial and environmental support systems for schoolchildren necessitates further

investigation into the effectiveness of home-school collaboration as a tool to facilitate homework completion.

This paper will explore multiple definitions of homework, the history of homework's debated purposes and level of importance, and the variability in resources found across families. The paper will examine various theories, beliefs, and assumptions about homework, and research on whether or not the act of completing homework leads to student achievement gains. The definition, attitudes and beliefs about, and the efficacy of home-school collaboration for increasing homework completion will be described.

## Homework

### Definition

Multiple definitions are available to explain the functions and make-up of homework assignments. Such variety may contribute to the confusion in homework expectations and the variability of homework assignments across the nation. Keith and DeGraff (1997) noted that homework is defined as a task that is given to students that is expected to be completed outside of the immediate classroom environment; the task can be finished at home or at school, however, the majority of the assignment is presumed to be completed in the students' homes. Some students begin their homework assignments at school because of access to reliable assistance through tutors or on-site instructors. Students can ask questions before bringing assignments home where they may have less direction and support. Similarly, Olympia et al. (1992) defined homework as educational assignments that are given to students within the school that are intended to broaden the usage of scholastic skills into alternate contexts during nonschool hours.

The lack of time to teach all of the necessary curricular concepts required of schools today has led to an increased focus upon extending the school day by sending home assignments which are intended to serve as an appendage to the lessons taught within the schoolhouse. Cooper (1989) defined homework as tasks assigned to students by schoolteachers, which are supposed to be completed outside of regular classroom time. More specifically, Olympia et al. (1992) suggested that school personnel expect students to complete the majority of their homework at home. The two common themes that define homework assignments seem to be that: (1) it is a task assigned by teachers, and (2) it is expected to be completed outside of class.

Historical Debate on the Importance of Homework

Although homework has been an integral part of education and schooling since the 19th century (Keith, 1986), its purpose and importance have been debated widely for many years. Throughout the past 50 years, there has been a multitude of disagreements as to whether or not homework is beneficial for students (Cooper, 1989). From the launch of Sputnik in the 1950's, which increased the call for additional homework responsibilities, to the increasing fears in the mid-1960's that homework was symbolic of the excessive pressures of society for people to succeed; the homework pendulum has swung back and forth for many years. Most recently arguments have focused on problems with the structure and relevancy of homework for a large number of heterogeneous students and their families.

Those who think homework is important to students' overall learning experiences point to the fact that the school day can be extended when students are given homework assignments that follow up classroom lessons (Keith, 1986). These individuals think

there is not enough time in a school day to give students ample time to practice and refine both their skills and knowledge. Supporters of homework think the tasks aid in creating more positive responsibilities (McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 1984), which may help to keep children out of trouble. If students are given too much free time, they may be more prone to exploring dangerous or negative societal entities (i.e., gangs, drugs, alcohol, sexual activity, etc.) without sufficient adult supervision.

There are also individuals who think there is already too much being put on the table in terms of students' educational responsibilities and that homework is just an additional educational obligation that actually takes away from other extra-curricular and familial activities that can have a positive impact on children (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Not only do homework responsibilities bog down and restrict students' free time, but it also takes away from and hampers the plans of entire families who desire quality family time away from such obligations (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1998). Many parents think they should be able to make more decisions about how their children's time is spent outside of school. Some students try to balance school responsibilities with time-consuming jobs or extensive assistance around the house (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). We live in a society in which there is an unequal balance of resources across families (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000) and, unfortunately, many children must fill the roles and adopt the responsibilities of their absentee parents.

## Theoretical Basis of Homework

There are a variety of learning theories that contribute to the argument for or against the practice of assigning homework and also lead to relevant suggestions for homework completion interventions. For instance, behavioral learning theory suggests

that repetition and practice are central to learning certain kinds of information. This theory further implies that we are born a blank slate and that our behaviors become a product of our environments (Friedman & Schustack, 1999). If a student can expect to learn a certain topic in school, the practice of assigning homework may give each student the extra repetition and practice they truly need. However, it becomes imperative that the student is provided with a positive study environment if they can be expected to have the highest potential for success.

Cognitive-behavioral learning theory has much overlap with behavioral learning theory; however, thinking, reflection, cognition, as well as the environment all play an important role in interventions that utilize the basis of cognitive-behavioral learning theory (Regehr, 2001). Self-monitoring and problem solving are both at the heart of this particular theory of learning. For example, with cognitive based interventions, individuals are taught to utilize certain strategies which may help them to take part in self-monitoring, self-reinforcement, and self-evaluation.

The operant conditioning theory of learning is based upon the idea that behavioral changes are the result of an individual's response to events or stimuli that occur in their immediate environment (Friedman & Schustack, 1999). Reinforcement is the key element in this particular theory. Therefore, teachers may find that strong homework performance should be paired with secondary reinforcers such as verbal praise, prizes, and good grades if they wish to see increases in performance. After all, behaviors which are positively reinforced, typically reoccur. If a student is not receiving much in the way of reinforcement, the teacher may need to alter the homework assignments so that the

child can experience more instances of success and the subsequent reinforcement and internal motivation that comes along with it.

Social learning theory proposes that we learn by modeling (Friedman & Schustack, 1999). Therefore, the observation and modeling of behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others, such as parents and peers, is of great importance. Teachers may decide to implement well-balanced homework or study groups within the classroom so that all students can benefit from the positive modeling of one another. With this type of set-up, the strengths of many students can shine in the eyes of his or her peers when different homework activities call for divergent make-ups of study partners. Additionally, cooperative-learning groups may promote higher achievement, greater productivity, and higher self-esteem. Moreover, students may be able to capitalize on and learn from the positive modeling of their parents when mothers or fathers provide appropriate assistance with homework assignments.

Attributional learning theories for success and failure have a strong effect on the learning styles and homework completion rates of many students as well. Each of the three dimensions has implications for individuals' motivation and affect (Burger & Forsyth, 1998). For instance, a stable, internal, and uncontrollable attribution for failure would have the most detrimental consequences for one's future expectations for success. When students are having difficulties with homework completion and academic success, it is important to help them to view failure as internal, controllable, and unstable when we know that the students are not working up to their potentials. We must remember that this theory supports the notions that both student behavior and capabilities are changeable. This can certainly be applied to homework completion difficulties.

Self-determination theory can contribute to increased levels of motivation. The theory explains that by having some level of perceived control in one's own environment, this gives the individual a feeling of autonomy, contributes to intrinsic motivation, and has a positive effect on their learning (Field, Hoffman, & Spezia, 1998). Furthermore, the theory has proclaimed that choice promotes deeper cognitive processing and a greater sense of enthusiasm when learning. This theory lends support to the notion of giving students a certain level of choice in their homework assignments. If the teacher can agree with the students upon the level of flexibility that they can tolerate, a variety of motivating homework assignments can be developed.

Information processing theory relates to the input, processing, storage, and retrieval of information (Kahan, Pusateri, Reed, & Tenpenny, 1998). Typically, an individual can recite back only 5-9 bits of information when it is presented in a random nature. However, if these separate bits of information can be combined together into chunks, the individual's capacity to store information is greatly increased. By utilizing certain strategies such as chunking and mnemonic devices, students can make tasks, such as certain math skills and simply remembering to complete their homework, more reasonable and successful. There are a variety of other psychological learning theories that may contribute to increases in homework completion rates in a variety of manners. They must continue to be explored and further applied to the context of homework completion if we can expect to see significant positive changes.

In addition to the psychological learning theories that have been touched upon, many parents and professionals also have strong opinions, personal theories, and a variety of beliefs about homework. Generally, most parents value homework and think it should

be assigned to their children. "Parents see homework as developing responsibility, providing independent study and preparation for future study, and strengthening the home-school bond" (Keith & DeGraff, 1997, p. 479). They clearly want to be better informed in regards to homework purposes and teachers' expectations, and they also desire to be equipped with the necessary knowledge, which will help them to be of better assistance to their children (Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001). Undoubtedly, schools must specifically answer this call for support from parents and guardians if they expect parents to continue to be motivated to support their children in school-related affairs, such as with homework assignments, and to work together as partners in the domain of education.

There are a wealth of additional theories, and beliefs in regards to the topic area of homework which center around a variety of subject areas. For instance, as already touched upon, Keith and DeGraff (1997) point out that although homework is intended as an assignment to be completed at home, there are many who believe teachers would be wise to introduce homework assignments to the class by letting students start on their assignments so any questions or problems can be cleared up in the classroom. This particular practice would also help to alleviate much of the variability in levels of parental assistance that is available within the homes of schoolchildren. This important step ensures that students will have the ability to complete the assignments on their own, which leads to less confusion and limits problems within the home. Therefore, parents or guardians may simply need to assist in the establishment of a proper study environment and/or a structured homework time.

Furthermore, many teachers, as well as parents, think that every homework assignment must require students to complete tasks that fall within their own range of abilities (Lee & Pruitt, 1979). By utilizing this preventative measure, many families will be relieved of additional stressors and the students may be made to feel a higher sense of self-efficacy because they were able to complete their homework on their own. However, teachers must be aware of the heterogeneity of abilities within their classrooms and should develop alternative assignments for those students who require them.

Moreover, it is presupposed by teachers, guardians, and students that the assigning of homework tasks is a standard role of schools and that parents will be available to assist their children with this responsibility (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). This belief may be somewhat far fetched in particular households and teachers must explicitly inquire into the level of support that each child has access to. We must remember that we are living in a very diversified heterogeneous society with parents and children that have varying levels of education, motivation, and perceptions of the inherent value of education. Some families may require additional avenues of assistance for helping their children with homework responsibilities.

Research

The majority of research in homework consists of studies which have explored whether or not the task contributes to achievement gains. There seems to be a lack of consensus as to whether or not homework completion contributes to significant gains in achievement. Not only have research-backed arguments been formulated on both sides of the fence, but the large diversity of measuring instruments and variables make it much more difficult to come to a clear conclusion on the connection between homework and

achievement. For example, McDermott et al. (1984) summarized studies conducted during the 1960's and 1970's and determined that no conclusion could be drawn about whether homework has positive or negative effects on student achievement. However, more recent studies have shown that homework assignments that are scrutinized or evaluated by parents, graded or remarked upon by teachers, incorporated with appropriate positive feedback, or are succeeded by positive and negative consequences, have been highly correlated with achievement gains for students (Olympia et al., 1994).

Cooper and Valentine (2001) found that homework completion led to higher levels of achievement for students in the higher grades. For example, middle school students had higher gains in achievement than elementary school students and high school students had higher gains in achievement than either elementary school or junior high school students as a result of homework completion. "In terms of high school students in particular, the effectiveness of homework for achievement gains is substantial especially when homework is practice or review of classwork" (Warton, 2001, p. 162). It is easy to see why so many studies have pointed to the positive connection between homework completion and achievement. After all, one would clearly expect to find higher rates of achievement to be strongly related to the amount of time students actually spend being actively engaged in completing academic tasks (Rosenberg, 1989).

Many times it is difficult to pick out the valid reports which make reference to higher or lower levels of achievement, as a result of homework completion, from the other bits and pieces of evidence which provide the same proclamations without any sufficient data-driven support to back these powerful assertions. For example, contemporary research has pointed out that the interconnection among homework and

achievement is more powerful when educator-determined grades are utilized as the achievement yardstick, as opposed to standardized test scores. However, this conclusion is to be anticipated because of the fact that homework assignments are more similar to the evaluations connected to school grades than are the assessments of standardized exams (Warton, 2001). This finding reveals an example of the wide variability in sources, which have been utilized to help make assertions as to the benefits or detriments of homework, in relation to achievement in school. It is easy to see how so much confusion and controversy has been developed in this particular area of study.

Although the majority of homework research has primarily focused upon the connection between achievement and homework, recent research trends have seen an increase in the interest concerning the connection between homework and collaboration between the home and school. However, because of its short history and minimal application, there is much more to be explored in this particular area of research interest.

## Home-School Collaboration

### Definition

Home-school collaboration is both an activity as well as an attitude that is held by members of the home and school contexts. Collaboration can be thought of as a commitment to teamwork or an agreement to invest multi-contextual efforts and resources towards a common goal or purpose. In a collaborative relationship, there is typically no one leader or individual that is expected to make a larger effort than the other involved members. Although it may be necessary for one individual to take part in the initial facilitation of this process, all members of the collaborative team must eventually be involved to the same extent if the collaborative effort can be expected to result in

overall success. In other words, unification, cooperation, consolidation and equality of efforts are all a part of the essence of collaborative relationships.

More specific to the contexts of home and school, Christenson (1995) explains that home-school collaboration is an active partnership between the school and the home in which all parties believe and partake in a shared responsibility for students' educational outcomes. Olympia et al. (1994) explain that parent-teacher behavioral consultation is one method which joins parents and teachers in an effort to work collaboratively towards a shared and valued goal. For example, teachers and parents can work together to identify the nature of a homework problem, can develop an effective and realistic homework program together that will meet the needs of all involved parties, can jointly monitor the effectiveness of the program which has been implemented across settings, can work together to modify any aspects of the homework program that might need to be changed, and can evaluate the efficiency of the overall outcome to make sure that everyone is comfortable with the effectiveness of the program, especially the student.

Additionally, within this collaborative relationship, Salend and Gajria (1995) explain, it may be necessary for parents and teachers to communicate on a regular basis with respects to identification of homework assignments, levels of homework progress, and the impact of homework assignments on the entire family. This shared communication conceivably would help to make the family believe as if the teacher, as well as other active members of the school personnel, truly cares about their child and it may result in a more positive feeling about school and school practices by the parents.

Attitudes and Beliefs about Home-School Collaboration

Home-school collaboration is both an activity as well as an attitude that does not develop automatically. Many parents and guardians are unable or unwilling to assist their children with the homework completion process because of a variety of factors including an actual or perceived lack of time, a lack of knowledge regarding the content of the work or of the tools needed for the homework completion process, or because of a pure lack of interest in their children's studies. Because of these unfortunate factors, many individuals believe that schools must become increasingly committed to facilitating home-school collaboration so that all members of the family-school system can be sufficiently involved, informed, and equipped with the necessary tools and knowledge to facilitate homework completion (Simon, 2001).

Furthermore, school personnel must make a specific point of helping parents and guardians to feel welcome in the overall school community in addition to attempts to educate and work with those parents or guardians who are in need of suggestions and/or assistance. If teachers or other relevant school personnel work closely together with parents or guardians, they may be better able to understand the context in which their students must complete their homework assignments, and therefore, may be better able to modify assignments or alter their classroom environments to better fit the students' and families needs (Xu & Corno, 1998).

Research

Olympia et al. (1996) have tried to answer the call for a more structured and germane home-school homework program by developing the *Homework Partners Series: Sanity Savers for Parents: Tips for Tackling Homework.* This manual is part of a series

of three separate manuals and was designed with children in grades 4-7 in mind. However, it can be utilized for students in both higher and lower grades after making appropriate alterations and accommodations. Olympia et al. (1996) have described that the impediments to homework completion can typically be attributed to five different types of problems which include a lack of a consistent place to study, difficulties with organization of materials and assignments, lack of a regular schedule or time to complete homework, motivational difficulties, and a high level of dependency upon others for assistance with homework. As a result of identifying these impediments, the authors have looked to a wealth of studies and have listed in the text, suggestions for facilitating homework completion. The research was further developed and eventually was constructed into a "group-based parent training program with an emphasis on parents designing their individual programs.... The training includes group meetings devoted to assessing homework problems, interfacing with the school and structuring the home environment, motivation, self-instruction training, and parent tutoring" (Olympia et al., 1992, p. 319).

Typically, a school psychologist or other qualified member of the school system leads parents through five weekly sessions in which they discuss individual and shared problems and work together to develop and refine individual programs for each family in attendance (Olympia et al., 1996). The manual gives examples of typical scenarios within the home and also gives various suggestions to parents and their children for overcoming the aforementioned impediments and barriers. For instance, the guidebook mentions that the utilization of home-school notes is a powerful communication tool that assures that the parents, students, and teachers all have the same information about daily

expectations for homework assignments (Olympia et al., 1996). The manual also explains that, at times, extra incentives are necessary to provide to some children in order for them to be able to generate motivation and enthusiasm for completion of their homework. The manual also points out that some children have problems with establishing both a consistent time and proper place to do their homework tasks. If a student can be expected to fulfill their homework responsibilities on a daily basis, it is necessary for them to have a peaceful and undisturbed place to do so (Olympia et al., 1996).

An additional suggestion is that parents provide pencils, paper, and other materials, which are required for the homework tasks, so additional distractions and work stoppages can be eliminated or significantly reduced. The manual also explains that by setting up a compulsory homework time, children will be required to use this entire interval to complete their homework or do other academic-related activities such as reading or reviewing old work and will have less incentive to rush through their work with limited effort in order to get to a more preferred activity. Lastly, the manual provides suggestions for specific motivational programs, which can be utilized by families in order to get their children to complete their homework with greater frequency. For instance, the manual explains the proper use of a Mystery Motivator, facilitation of self-management strategies, steps for developing self-instruction, and other such beneficial programs, materials, and processes.

Although the work of Olympia et al. (1996) seems promising, various aspects of the program were still being field tested and refined as of the early 1990's. I was unable to locate any empirical research that specifically validates its usefulness and applicability

in the context of a home-school collaboration program. Therefore it is necessary to continue to explore the empirical research focusing on facilitating both homework completion and home-school collaboration and to come to some additional conclusions based upon this investigation.

There are several ways to look at the subsequent series of studies that have incorporated a variety of interventions and tactics, which were, and were not, incorporated into the *Sanity Savers* project. Some of the studies specifically focus upon using interventions that train students to become more independent in their homework completion responsibilities, while still utilizing the parents or guardians as mediating collaborators. Other studies explicitly seek parent involvement as the main intervention to increase homework completion rates, but also understand the importance of creating student maturity and independence. Lastly, the remaining studies utilize a combination of interventions such as daily report cards or data sheets, home-school communication, graphs, reinforcements, structured study spaces in combination with compulsory study times, and homework planners in order to assist in the facilitation of increasing homework completion.

Self-Instruction/Self-Monitoring/and Self-Management Studies

Fish and Mendola (1986) investigated the effect of self-instruction training on rates of homework completion. With self-instruction training "children are taught how to use verbalizations to direct their own behavior. Once learned, these verbalizations become mediating directions between environmental stimuli and behavior. Children use this covert speech to guide their overt behavior" (p. 268-269). The researchers felt that because homework completion is an activity, which typically takes place in an

environment in which there are numerous competing influences and in which teachers have little control, self-instruction would be an advantageous intervention to explore.

A total of three children, 1 female and 2 males, participated as subjects in the study. Their ages ranged from 8 years 11 months to 9 years 11 months with a mean age of 9 years 0 months. All children were students in a special education classroom located in a suburban public elementary school. All subjects were selected to take part in the study because of their low rates of homework completion, which fell below the 50% completion range. The special education teacher assigned homework tasks on 4 days of the week. A multiple baseline design across subjects was utilized for the study, which set out to explore the percentages of completed homework assignments handed in each week. Following the 6-week baseline condition, the treatment aspect of the program was initiated for the first subject. Follow-up data were collected when the subjects returned to school the next fall term. The recording of homework completion began 91 days after the last homework assignment in June, which was in the second week of the following fall term.

Subjects were trained in the self-instruction methods for 8 different half-hour training sessions, which lasted over a 2-week period.

The self-instruction training was based on Meichenbaum and Goodman's (1971) procedure: (a) the experimenter provided the subject with a modeled performance on a task by talking out loud to himself/herself; (b) the subject performed the task as the experimenter verbalized out loud; (c) the subject performed the task while instructing himself/herself out loud; (d) the subject performed the task but this time whispered the instruction to himself/herself; and (e) the subject was told to silently repeat the

words to himself/herself as he/she performed the task (Fish & Mendola, 1986, p. 270).

Each subject was instructed to use this entire sequence of steps for all of the tasks they were required to complete within the training sessions. Furthermore, the trainers told the subjects, by saying these things, it would serve as a reminder for them to do their homework assignments. Therefore, the objectives of the treatment design were to create a cognitive style for students that allowed them to gauge homework requirements, cognitively repeat the necessary steps, and subsequently monitor their homework performance by utilizing the self-instruction strategies. This intervention capitalized on the benefits of both the social learning theory as well as the cognitive-behavioral learning theory. The modeling of effective behaviors paired with repeated practice and self-management strategies gave the subjects an idea of what was expected of them.

The researchers (Fish & Mendola, 1986) discovered the average homework completion rates during baseline to be 29.1% for Eddie, 34.3% for Rose, and 40% for Tom, and that all three subjects' homework completion rates rose to an average of 75% during the implementation of self-instruction training. They also found post-treatment averages for homework completion to be 66.6% for Eddie, 90% for Rose, and 91.7% for Tom. Lastly, after Eddie moved out of the district, subsequent data for 8 weeks into the fall term was accessible for the other 2 experimental subjects. The average percentage of homework completion was 96.8% for Rose and 87% for Tom. In summary, the results of this investigation point to the fact that homework completion rates can be significantly improved for children in a special education setting as a result of self-instruction training. Although this particular intervention did not directly involve the collaboration between

individuals in the home and school settings, it is a relevant intervention, which can be utilized, refined, and shared between the contexts of the home and the school.

Trammel, Schloss, and Alper (1994) explored the effects of utilizing self-recording, evaluation, and graphing in order to raise the rates of homework assignment completion. More explicitly, the researchers took part in a study to inquire into the influence of a self-monitoring strategy on homework completion rates for secondary students who had been diagnosed with learning disabilities. It was anticipated that the self-monitoring strategy would assist students in their rates of both daily homework completion and accuracy. A total of six male students and two female students, ranging in age from 13 years 9 months to 16 years 0 months, took part in the investigation. All of the subjects had previously been diagnosed with a specific learning disability based upon the criteria, which had been established in the *Missouri Special Education Criteria Guidelines*. All eight subjects that were attending grades 7 through 10 in a small, rural public school, were chosen to take part in this investigation because of their chronic failure to complete their daily homework assignments, as reported by their classroom teachers. The students' parents had expressed interest in letting their children be involved in the study if it would lead to the development of a program improving their child's overall level of academic performance.

The subjects were trained in methods of self-instruction within their resource room and were told they would have to chart their own completion rates for each homework assignment (Trammel et al., 1994). The entire study lasted over a period of 73 consecutive school days and utilized a multiple baseline across subjects design to evaluate the influence of the intervention. This scheme was selected because of its

efficiency in assigning behavioral shifts in several persons to a distinct intervention. Each student was provided with an 'assignment sheet' in which they could record each of their daily assignments and they were also specifically trained to use the sheet so that all instances of confusion could be eliminated. The self-monitoring phase followed baseline and was maintained for 11 consecutive school days in which students were to make record of all of their homework assignments on their assignment sheets.

It had been determined that the assignment completion criterion would be set at a level of 70% completion, as well as requiring the assignment to be turned in on time. An additional aspect of this intervention process involved having the students utilize a self-graphing method in which they kept visual records for both themselves, and for all others to see within the resource room, in regards to their homework completion rates. Students established and posted goals, which they aspired to meet, and reconsidered their new goals once every three days based upon their levels of performance. Lastly, in the final step of the investigation process, the performance graphs as well as the assignment sheets were removed from the intervention and students were to keep their own records of homework completion at their own discretion and without any pre-established reminders or rewards.

Analysis of the data showed that the self-monitoring phase was successful in significantly increasing the level of homework assignment completion for all students (Trammel et al., 1994). The trend of each student completing between four and six assignments per day continued throughout the self-monitoring phase, even though teacher participation in the treatment was removed in this phase. The accelerated rates of student performance regarding homework completion behavior were also sustained during the

goal-setting and self-graphing phase. Results of the data analysis also showed that each student maintained a level of homework production of four to six assignments per day at follow-up. Trammel et al. (1994) were able to conclude that self-monitoring was efficacious in boosting overall homework completion rates for those students included in the study. Furthermore, this particular outcome was intensified as a result of the self-graphing and self-evaluation strategies. Both students, as well as parents, felt that the study and its intervention components had led to positive results regarding overall academic improvement and assistance with managing homework assignments. However, the authors pointed to the need for further replication of this study if their results were able to be generalized to other curriculum areas, to students with various disabilities, to students of various ages, and to students with varied educational histories.

Callahan et al., (1998) conducted a study in which they investigated the effects of parent participation in using strategies to improve the homework performance standards of students who have been identified as 'at risk'. More specifically, the 10-week research investigation attempted to analyze the outcome of a parent facilitated home-based plan that utilized both reinforcement and self-management strategies to improve the scholastic achievements of their at risk children. A total of 26 sixth- and seventh-grade middle school students and their families gave their consent to take part in the study. All of the students were Caucasian except for one child who was Hispanic, and all of the children came from lower-middle to middle-class homes. Only six of the 26 students who took part in the study were females and almost half of the entire subject pool came from single-parent homes. The researchers decided that the students must attempt at least half

of the items on any given homework assignment and also must turn the assignment in to the teacher on the day after it was assigned in order for it to be considered to be complete.

Throughout both the baseline data collection and intervention phases, teachers assigned their students a math homework assignment on 4 separate days of the week (Callahan et al., 1998). Additionally, the parent-facilitated self-management process was implemented during the intervention phase in which the parents also monitored and checked their child's homework. After going through the process of completing the homework assignment, having it checked by the parent(s), and having the student work on the necessary corrections, the parent and student matched and compared their ratings of the homework assignment(s). The students earned 100, 200, or 300 matching points depending upon the accuracy of their ratings as compared to those of their parents. The points were to be utilized for acquiring tangible rewards from the student's personal reinforcement list. Students were given the choice to redeem their points as soon as they were attained or to save their points for more expensive items. Students were also given the opportunity to earn additional points in their at-risk class by handing in their student/parent checklists and by finishing their math homework assignments. The in-class points were utilized to acquire items from the classroom reinforcement list, which included such things as folders, pencils, pens, sodas, and candy bars (Callahan et al., 1998).

The study was a multiple baseline design across groups and the actual experiment was conducted for 10 weeks. Although there was some level of operant conditioning imposed into this study when the subjects received rewards for their matching of ratings with their parents, it must also be noted that a certain level of cognitive-behavioral

learning theory was implemented into the interventions as the subjects were required to self-monitor and self-evaluate their homework completion rates.

Callahan et al. (1998) found both homework quality and homework completion rates to improve significantly as a result of the intervention. More specifically, homework completion percentages improved close to an average of 100% over baseline levels for 20 of the 26 total participants. Further investigation into the results of the study revealed that the parents who implemented the strategies both accurately and consistently were more likely to have helped their children to improve their homework completion rates, whereas, those parents who did not make the same efforts were much less likely to have helped their children to produce increased rates of homework completion and accuracy. The researchers found that both the parents, as well as students, rated the intervention program very favorably and explained that the intervention strategies were also useful and easily generalized to improving homework completion rates in other classes, which were not part of the study. The researchers drew to a close by stating that this investigation helps to lend credence to other studies that claim that both student success and achievement are improved when parents become specifically involved in the educational undertakings of their children.

Explicit Parental Involvement Studies

Rhoades and Kratochwill (1998) took part in a study, which set out to assess the effectiveness of a condensed parent-training plan to ameliorate the scholastic performance of students and resolve homework problems within the home. The intervention was an adapted version of the group intervention program that was developed within the *Sanity Savers* (Olympia et al., 1996) project. These researchers

(Rhoades & Kratochwill, 1998) felt that because homework typically takes place within the home, it would be necessary to coordinate interventions between the school and the home in order to see any significant changes as a result of this implicitly shared involvement. Seven teachers from grades 4, 5, and 6 were asked to identify all students within their classrooms who had significant homework difficulties as a result of a lack of work completion after 9 weeks of school already being in session. Substantial difficulties were identified as falling short of consummating two or more homework exercises on-time each week, in any specific subject area, over an interval of 4 weeks or more. After working to obtain both parental consent for the intervention and parental agreement to take part in the training, five Caucasian male students from low- to moderate-income families were selected to take part in the study. However, the fifth student simply served as a wait-list control subject who would be utilized only in the case that one of the four parents in the experimental group was unable to partake in the study. Additionally, a comparison sample was selected from a group of nominated children, as well.

A Master's level school psychologist, who worked within the same midwestern rural community school district in which the study was conducted, carried out the research and necessary training. The efficacy of the parent homework training plan was evaluated by utilizing a multiple baseline design across participants (Rhoades & Kratochwill, 1998). The intervention lasted over the course of 6-8 weeks and was comprised of five face-to-face training meetings. The utilization of positive reinforcement, consistent study times, and home-school communication were underscored in the consultation training meetings. Parents were to have developed, refined, and utilized an individualized program at the conclusion of the 5-weeks of

training. Three weekly phone calls were made between the consultant and the parent at post training in order to monitor the progress of the intervention. Parents were required to log weekly data on start times for studying, estimates of time-on-task, and special notes on any problems and/or concerns. Additionally, teachers were required to keep data on both completion and accuracy rates for all students who were involved in the study.

The results gave evidence to the fact that students made both socially and clinically significant gains in assignment completion (Rhoades & Kratochwill, 1998). Furthermore, the data pointed to significant changes in homework completion rates for problem students who closely matched the rates of completion for the non-problem peers who had served as a control group. Investigation of the graphed data revealed the positive changes in homework completion occurred simultaneously with the introduction of the treatment intervention and it was found to be maintained for at least 18, 11, and 6 weeks into follow-up for subjects one, two, and three respectively. Unfortunately, no follow-up data was available for the fourth subject. The entire intervention training and implementation process required nearly 7 hours of contact time with parents and 2.5 hours of contact time with the teachers over the regulated 5-week period.

The study addressed student homework difficulties by teaching parents how to utilize particular homework interventions, such as establishing systematically structured times for homework completion. The principal signs of treatment validity were teacher reports of enhanced levels of student assignment completion and parental reports of increased levels of conformity to home study guidelines. The results of this study also point to the strength of consultation relationships between the home and the school and

identify this process as one of the essential components of the entire intervention (Rhoades & Kratochwill, 1998).

Weiner, Sheridan, and Jenson (1998) investigated the effects of conjoint behavioral consultation paired with a structured homework program on both math completion and accuracy rates with junior high students. These researchers felt there was a strong need for this type of research because of the fact that parental involvement typically declines after elementary school, but continued participation throughout all levels of formalized education, on the part of the parents, is both helpful and greatly desired. Conjoint behavioral consultation (CBC) is one particular method that can be utilized to enhance collaborative relationships between homes and schools. It is one such method that may contribute to increased levels of parental involvement in both middle schools and high schools. CBC is an indirect model of service transmission where teachers and parents are brought together by a third party for the purposes of identification and remediation of the social, behavioral, or academic problems of a student who is in need. The four successive stages of CBC are problem identification, problem analysis, treatment implementation, and treatment evaluation.

The underlying theory of CBC takes on an ecological perspective and acknowledges the fact that children, families, and schools all share an interdependent influence upon one another. Consequently, a collaborative and supportive relationship between all individuals is required in order for the child to obtain the maximum benefits from the resources, which are available in both the educational and home environments.

The CBC consultant typically works together with both the teacher and the parent(s) in order to offer their indirect services to the student who is in need (Weiner et al., 1998). Specifically in the context of homework, CBC consultation can

> assist the parent and teacher in: (a) identifying the nature of homework problems, (b) designing an effective plan across settings for increasing time spent on homework, and improving the accuracy and completion rate of the homework, (c) ensuring systematic monitoring and data collection of a homework program's effect on completion and accuracy, (d) determining modifications necessary to improve the homework program, and (e) assessing whether treatment goals have been achieved (p. 284).

A CBC consultant can be any number of individuals, within the schools (i.e., school psychologists, counselors, teachers, school consultants, etc.), who are formally trained in methods of consultation and other such areas which are relevant to the practices of both schools and families within the community.

The objective of this research investigation was to evaluate the effectiveness of a CBC homework intervention program being utilized by teachers and parents of middle school students who were experiencing problems with math homework accuracy and completion (Weiner et al., 1998). A total of five subjects took part in the study and ranged in age from 14 to 15 years old. The three girls and two boys were all Caucasians and were all raised within middle class families. All of the subjects who were selected were determined to not have any learning disabilities, which would preclude their ability to perform at grade level, and all subjects were selected based upon their severe difficulties with homework effort, completion, and accuracy. The intervention was

utilized in both the home and the regular classroom setting and a multiple baseline across participants design was used within this analysis.

During the baseline phase of the study, parents were asked to monitor the amount of time that their children were spending on their homework tasks each night as well as to make note of any other concerns or questions they might have. Furthermore, both teachers and parents were asked to keep a close record of any individuals, behaviors, or conditions which were getting in the way of their child's homework completion efforts (Weiner et al., 1998). Teachers were also asked to make sure to keep record of subjects' homework completion and accuracy rates. The initial step in the homework intervention process was to have the students utilize a day planner to record their homework assignments and to have the teacher to sign off on the assignments when they were assigned, as well as when they were brought back to class. Because most, if not all, of these students had problems with designating a structured time and place to do homework, the second part of the intervention required the parents to help their children to establish an appropriate homework time and location which would take into consideration all the individuals' schedules and needs. Students were able to earn daily reinforcers at home as well as weekly reinforcers at school. However, acquisition of the more desirable long-term reinforcers was dependent upon the student's overall accuracy on homework tasks. All of the students chose a long-term reinforcer at the onset of the intervention and their parents made an agreement that they would deliver the reinforcer if homework accuracy rates were at 70% or higher at the conclusion of the intervention.

The baseline levels of homework completion for all five subjects were 87% for subject one, 49% for subject two, 57% for subject three, 53% for subject four, and 71%

for subject five (Weiner et al., 1998). On the other hand, after treatment, the homework completion rates for the five subjects changed to 89%, 99%, 100%, 86%, and 62% respectively. The parents and teachers both felt that the interventions were generally effective, however, the students found the interventions neither favorable nor unfavorable. Weiner et al. (1998) were able to conclude that progress was noticeable for most of the students in terms of both homework accuracy and completion. More specifically, enhancements in both accuracy and completion averages were found between baseline and treatment phases for four of the five total participants. However, the researchers did make mention of the fact that it is nearly impossible to identify the combination of or sole influence of the interventions which helped to create this change because of the design of this type of study.

Simon (2001) looked into the effects of high schools' outreach programs on levels and frequency of family involvement. Simon points to the fact that parent involvement typically drops off as children get older, even though parental involvement is both helpful and advantageous even at the high school level. Simon also hypothesizes about the reasons for this drop in involvement by explaining that adolescents typically strive for more autonomy from their parents, parents may not be able to or may not know how to help with the homework when children reach this level of schooling, and school personnel work to recruit parental involvement at a much lower rate than they typically do in the primary grades and therefore, overall levels of involvement significantly drop off. The analyses of this particular study were derived from samples collected from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS). This study was carried out in 1988 by the National Center for Education Statistics. The NELS was a panel study that tracked a

group of students as they progressed from middle school, to high school, and finally into university training or employment. These students were tracked over this time period in order to collect data on a variety of research related topics of investigation. Furthermore, as an additional component of the study, researchers conducting the NELS surveyed the parents of these children. The study obtained data from a total of 11,348 parents who consummated the second follow-up survey.

Although this study did not solely concentrate on home-school relationships that could increase levels of homework completion, the study did specifically investigate the established assertion that familial participation would be affirmatively influenced by direct outreach by the high school. More specifically, it was anticipated that high schools' outreach would influence families to get more involved with their child's education regardless of the students' race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, family structure, or achievement levels (Simon, 2001). Much of the information gathering and analysis was derived from questionnaires and other similar methods of data collection. The investigation helped to reveal a variety of behaviors which result from increases in outreach for parental involvement such as more exchanges of conversation between parents and their child as a result of the school contacting parents about teens' course selection or about teens' plans after high school. Furthermore, parents explained that when schools contacted them in order to ask them to volunteer in the school, parents were found to be much more likely to volunteer as an audience member at the school. In parents' reports of the frequency with which they had worked with their children on homework tasks,

About two-thirds (65%) of parents indicated that they worked on homework with

> their teens at least sometimes, with 21% of these parents reporting that they worked on homework with their teens 'frequently.' Even at the high school level, with more complicated curricula, the majority of parents worked with their teens on homework (p. 14).

Parents further reported that the frequency with which they worked on homework with their children depended significantly upon school contacts about how to help their children in this context. In other words, more school contact resulted in more parental assistance. Interestingly, parents also reported working more frequently on their child's homework when members of the school contacted them about their child's preparatory course selections.

In summary, the final analysis of Simon's (2001) study revealed that those parents who recounted that their teens' schools were reaching out at a higher degree were more inclined to communicate that there was increased involvement in a variety of learning-at-home projects, after statistically controlling for teens' gender, socioeconomic status, family structure, achievement levels, and race or ethnicity. This study helps to lend credence to the fact that high schools have the capacity to reach out to families and this extended invitation may lead to increases in familial involvement. Moreover, the habits of families are not set in stone by the time their child has reached the high school level and schools have a responsibility to help make parents feel both valuable and welcome. Simon (2001) concludes his investigation by expressing that both families and students should be entitled to exceptional collaborative partnerships, which contribute to higher levels of student achievement and success. Furthermore, it is extremely important for future research to continue to investigate the multifarious forms of partnerships between

families, schools, and the greater community so that all students can be better supported in their learning.

Xu and Corno (1998) took part in a study, which inquired into how parents from six different families did homework with their third-grade children. The researchers analyzed videotaped homework interactions between the parents and their children to look for any effects or outcomes, which were mediated by parents. Xu and Corno (1998) planned to investigate the ways in which parents assisted their children with organizing the home environment, dealing with diversions, and pointing out relevant aspects of the entire homework completion process. However, the researchers were also interested in looking at how children motivated themselves and learned to divert distractions while completing homework tasks. Case studies were utilized in order to provide an in-depth analysis of each individual family's homework interaction styles. The six participants in the study were third-grade students from one K-5 public elementary school, which was located in New York City, as well as the parents of these children who had volunteered. There was a high range of diversity, in terms of cultural backgrounds, across all six families who volunteered. However, all six families included well-educated parents who worked in professional careers and whom all claimed that they regularly helped their children with their homework assignments. The third grade was chosen for the focus of this investigation because it was the grade in which most children began to be assigned homework at this particular school.

The subjects were split into two separate groups and were given homework assignments that were either provided on a daily basis, being tied to in-class course work, or on a weekly basis in a packet format, which included six to seven pages of

assignments covering a wide area of topics (Xu & Corno, 1998). All children were asked to invest nearly forty-five to sixty minutes of their nightly time on their homework tasks. If this time span was not sufficient, students were either required to spend the extra time necessary to complete the assignment or to have their parents write a message to the teacher with an explanation as to why the assignment could not be completed on time. The data was compiled from three sources including two videotaped homework sessions with each family, open-ended questioning conferences with students, parents, and teachers, and stimulated-recall interviews with parents after each homework completion period. More specifically, the interviews with parents and children were employed as a tool to investigate and compare the families' perceptions of typical homework behaviors to those true behaviors, which could later be observed in the videotaped observations. In the videotaped observation condition, it was requested that parents did homework with their children in the same context, at the same time, and with the same people who would typically be a part of the homework task completion environment. In the stimulated-recall interviews, researchers met with parents to watch the videotaped homework sessions so they could make comments, observations, rationalizations, and future plans.

Analysis of the data from the various sources of data collection revealed that both parents and teachers valued homework for its ability to reinforce what children were learning in the classroom and for its ability to develop a sense of responsibility in their children's lives (Xu & Corno, 1998). The students felt homework was one specific avenue in which they could work hard to gain approval from significant adults in their lives, so extrinsic motivators seemed to play a large role in their motivation to complete the work. Data analysis also revealed that four of the six parents felt that the

commitment to help their children with homework assignments commanded a more significant amount of their time and attention than they had previously thought it would. They explained that setting aside the time to assist their children frequently prevented them from paying sufficient attention to their own responsibilities, such as social gatherings, evening work responsibilities, and personal time to take care of their own needs and desires. Only one of the six children who were interviewed stated that she liked homework more than any other after-school activity in which she was typically involved. In most cases, the task of homework completion was a challenge for both children as well as parents in all of the six families.

Analysis of the data also gave evidence that all six parents made efforts to locate the best possible locations within their homes for their children to complete their homework (Xu & Corno, 1998). Moreover, each of the parents assisted their children with organizing and preparing a proper place to do their homework. Furthermore, four of the six parents assisted their children with finding a place to put their assignments and homework tools (i.e., pencils, paper, erasers, etc.) so they could be better prepared and organized for completing their assigned homework tasks. All of the parents restricted the use of the television, radio, telephone, or any other distracting device during homework completion times. When the children were asked, all six of them had a good idea of the best location for them to complete their homework assignments and all knew the location must be one which is free from distractions but also close in proximity to available assistance from parents or guardians.

All six parents also made a point of letting their children have some time to relax after school before starting on their homework (Xu & Corno, 1998). Moreover, all

parents also made a point of establishing a routine for their children to follow so homework could be worked on at or around the same time each and every day. All of the families also tried to give their children some independence when deciding which assignment to work on first. Furthermore, each of the parents made an effort to encourage their children to finish their homework assignments on time by assisting them with planning, keeping track of assignments yet to be completed, and helping them to make note of important deadlines. To some extent or another, all of the children encountered some frustration with getting started on homework because it typically prevented them from taking part in a more desired activity. Of additional relevance, four of the five total children who were able to take charge of their homework responsibilities on their own, in order to meet deadlines, appeared to have benefited from strategies that they obtained from their parents along the way. All of the parents within the study made an effort to complement their children on their good work, with some parents choosing to use complements or praise, and all parents also warned their children when they were not working hard on their homework tasks or when they did a poor job on their assignments. Further investigation turned up evidence that five of the six subjects self-monitored their own levels of motivation to give themselves a boost to follow through with completing their assignments.

The process of completing homework was a difficult activity, which was resented by many of the families (Xu & Corno, 1998). However, data pointed to the fact that parents took it upon themselves to monitor their children's emotional states so they could better help them to follow through on their homework tasks. Moreover, four of the students made a point of monitoring their own temperaments so that they could complete

their homework assignments. They utilized such methods as positive self-talk, looking on the bright side, and taking small breaks during homework sessions. Many of the strategies, which the students used in order to get their assignments done, seemed to be internalized strategies which had been acquired as a result of the adult modeling.

Once again, we see how social learning theory can be incorporated into effective homework completion interventions. Although the conclusions of this study are not limited to any one particular cultural group because of the high diversity found in the sample of subjects, the conclusions are however, to be based upon families in which parents are hard-working professionals who have an invested interest in the academic progress of their children. Further, the generalizability of the data is in question because the data was obtained from only six separate cases in one grade level. The children in the study were also all high achieving students, which is likely not a representative sample that can be generalized to all third-grade classroom contexts.

Mixed Intervention Studies (i.e., daily report cards or data sheets, graphing, communication, and praise)

Strukoff, McLaughlin, and Bialozor (1987) investigated the effects of utilizing a daily report card system to increase the homework completion and accuracy rates for a student within the context of a special education classroom setting. The primary purpose of the study was to specifically investigate the amount of necessary parent contact needed for a daily report card to be effective in increasing a single student's homework completion and accuracy rates. Additionally, the study also set out to explore teachers', parents', and peers' perceptions of the student's academic behavior following the intervention, as well as the level of satisfaction the parents found in utilizing such a

system. The sole subject of this study was a fifth-grade female who was enrolled in a resource room setting for her entire instruction in mathematics. The researchers decided that a completed assignment would be defined as the student finishing all of the questions, which had been assigned to her, and turning in the assignment at the next available math period. In order to evaluate the outcome of the daily report card program, the researchers utilized a single-subject ABAB reversal design.

The study commenced with a baseline data collection condition, which lasted for 9 weeks. Subsequently, the teacher completed a daily report card for a period of 8 weeks, in which the teacher indicated whether or not the preceding day's homework assignment had been completed. The parents were simply told to anticipate that a report would be sent along with their child's homework, however, there were never any clear-cut guidelines established for the delivery of any home-based contingencies (Strukoff et al., 1987). After this time frame, a reversal period of 4 weeks was instituted in which the daily report card intervention was not utilized. Following the 4-week layoff, the daily report card was sent home with the student once again and the researchers were then able to make some conclusions based upon their overall findings. The findings revealed that the subject finished 9.3% of the assigned homework tasks under the initial baseline condition and 75% of the homework assignments when the report card was sent home on a daily basis. When the study shifted back to baseline for a second time, the student only completed 11.1% of the assigned homework tasks. Once again, an increase was witnessed when the daily report card was sent home for a second time as the student reached a 50% rate of homework completion. The results of this data suggest that the

utilization of a daily report card increased both homework assignment completion and accuracy rates for the student who was involved in this study.

Further findings revealed that the student's peers requested a daily report card as well, because of their interest in the intervention (Strukoff et al., 1987). This level of acceptance may have further implications for interventions, which incorporate group contingencies or other cooperative class-wide methods of change. Additionally, habitual communication between the home and the school was a positive aspect of the intervention that was openly and frequently talked about by the parents of the subject. Therefore, one must assume these parents found value in the process of home-school connections. Moreover, the survey data revealed that all participants in the study were satisfied with the intervention and thought sufficient academic progress had been made as a result. The researchers concluded the study by explaining that the daily report card system seemed to be a beneficial, productive, and cost-effective technique for modifying a students' behavior.

Bryan and Sullivan-Burstein (1998) took part in a series of 3 studies, which set out to investigate the effectiveness of teacher-selected strategies for improving homework completion rates. The teachers involved in the 3 studies mentioned hereafter, were involved in a cooperative effort to develop beneficial homework interventions across a span of 2 years. The team of teachers decided to utilize both reinforcements and real-life assignments as interventions in the first year and a homework planner and self-graphing of homework completion as interventions for the second year of the studies.

The initial study was carried out within a K-6 elementary school that was located in a suburban residential area (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1998). Four primary-level

teachers, five intermediate-level teachers, and two learning disabilities teachers were selected to take part in the study. Prior to the start of the study, the teachers agreed that they would define students with homework problems as those students who had poor completion rates or accuracy rates on 25% of their assignments or more. The design of the study required the students to be divided into four distinctive groups, which included 1) students with learning disabilities who exhibited homework difficulties, 2) students with learning disabilities who did not exhibit homework difficulties, 3) students without learning disabilities who exhibited homework difficulties, and 4) students without learning disabilities who did not exhibit homework difficulties. The teachers concluded that they would give approximately four assignments per week to the final sample of 123 students. Although a primary goal of the study was to increase the rates of homework completion for all students, teachers also decided it was important to develop further avenues for communication with parents and to get parents more involved with the homework responsibilities of their children. Even though the teachers felt that the students should be responsible for finishing their own homework assignments, they also theorized that parents could assist their children by being both supportive of as well as knowledgeable about their children's homework responsibilities.

After working together as a team, the teachers decided to conduct baseline data collection for a period of two weeks, reinforce students with extra recess time for a period of three weeks, assign real-life homework assignments which were intended to help students to make a connection between the lessons and their lives at home for a period of three weeks, and utilize both the reinforcement and real-life assignment methods collectively for an additional time period of three weeks. The study was comprised of a 2

group (average achieving, learning disabled) by 2 homework (no problems, problems) factorial design over four conditions including a baseline, reinforcement, real-life assignment, and a combination of reinforcement and real-life assignment condition. As would be expected, results of the data analysis revealed that average-achieving students completed more homework than students with learning disabilities and students without homework problems completed more homework than students who did have homework problems. Furthermore, it was found that students in the combined real-life assignment plus reinforcement condition completed significantly more homework than they did in the baseline condition. Finally, taking into consideration the fact that the students without learning disabilities who had a lack of homework difficulties were already close to the ceiling, the interventions were significantly more effective for those students who had learning disabilities, with and without homework difficulties, as well as for those students who did not have learning disabilities but whom struggled with their homework.

Moving into the second year of the series of studies (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1998), teachers decided to test the impact of a homework planner on homework completion rates because many teachers felt homework problems were part of a larger issue of development of organizational skills. Furthermore, teachers also discussed that their initial interventions had not touched upon one of their initial goals, which was to increase parent communication and involvement. Therefore, they set out to establish a more effective way in which the home and school could communicate more clearly and more frequently about students' homework. Shortly after gathering to discuss the shortcomings of their first study, the teachers began their second of three studies within the established two-year time frame. In this second study, the researchers decided that

the focus of the study would be to observe the influence of the utilization of a homework planner on the homework completion rates of students both with and without learning disabilities and with and without homework difficulties. In the second study, teachers decided to utilize the same criterion of 75% or less completion in order to identify those students who had homework problems. As a result, 33 students with learning disabilities who had homework problems and 6 students with learning disabilities who did not have homework problems were selected to take part in this study.

All parents were informed that students were going to be utilizing a daily planner and that parents were welcome to sign off on their child's homework and send any messages to the teachers that they desired within their child's planner. Results of this second study pointed to the fact that average-achieving students with homework problems completed significantly more homework when they were given homework planners than when they did not utilize them. Additionally, those students who had learning disabilities, homework problems, and no planners were found to have completed the least amount of homework of all of the groups. Moreover, results of the second study revealed that those students who had learning disabilities, as well as those who did not have learning disabilities but did have homework difficulties, gained the most positive benefits from the homework planner. The teachers were also further encouraged by the fact that they had received many positive comments from parents with respects to the intervention and several parents and teachers had utilized the planners to exchange information between the home and the school.

Within the second year, the team of teachers continued to investigate additional ways to improve both students' organizational skills and homework completion rates. As

a focus for the third and final study (Bryan & Sullivan-Burstein, 1998), the teachers decided to investigate the influence of having students monitor their own homework completion rates by utilizing graphs. More specifically, the objective of the third study was to evaluate the influence of graphing by four groups of students, including those with and without learning disabilities and those with and without homework difficulties, on their rates of homework completion in both math and spelling. Researchers decided to utilize the 2 weeks of homework completion data from the second study as baseline data for the graphing phase of the third study. Results of this study pointed to the fact that graphing had no significant effects on increasing the overall rates of math homework completion. However, researchers did find graphing to have a significant effect on the increase of spelling homework completion for students within the study. As a result of this final investigation, the graphing method developed into a very well received tool for students, parents, and teachers. In fact, the teachers expressed a desire to generalize this graphing technique to other test scores and subjects as well.

In summary, results from Bryan and Sullivan-Burstein's (1998) series of studies revealed that all of the interventions, which were utilized in the three studies, were reasonably easy to implement. Furthermore, the researchers have suggested that the designs chosen by this team of teachers could be easily generalized to assist with similar difficulties in classrooms of diverse groups of students. However, the researchers did explain that they were unable to specify which one of the interventions was more effective than the others because they did not systematically test different order effects of the interventions. Lastly, the researchers explained that the academic changes, which were made as a result of the collaborative effort between the teachers, led to improved

levels of performance and homework completion for students, with and without learning disabilities, who had problems with their homework.

In yet another study, Schloss, Schloss, and Segraves (1983) set out to explore the effects of home-school cooperation in motivating a rise in completion rates for homework tasks. More specifically, their research investigation was developed in order to assess the effectiveness of a home-school collaboration plan, which featured sequential goal setting through a changing criterion format. The lone subject for this investigation was a fifteen-year-old male student who was enrolled in a cross-categorical, self-contained classroom for mildly handicapped adolescents. Due to the fact that the subject's homework completion rate had been reported to be below 10% for the school year, increasing homework completion was selected as the target of the intervention. After baseline data was collected for a total of six consecutive school days and following a formal meeting between the teacher, student, and his parents, the intervention strategy was implemented.

Within the collaborative meeting, the parents and the child explained that television, basketball games, plays, and other social events were the activities that typically got in the way of homework completion efforts. Although the teacher felt it was necessary to implement an intervention to assist with motivating the child to complete his homework with greater frequency, the teacher also understood that these social activities were important to the child and therefore, the teacher recommended that an unobtrusive goal of 20 percent be instituted for the initially expected homework completion rates (Schloss et al., 1983). Furthermore, it was also decided that once the target goal was met for five consecutive days, the criterion would be slightly increased. Additionally, the group came to the conclusion that this sequential process would continue until the subject

achieved an acceptable level of 80% homework completion. The teacher informed the parents that he/she would send home a daily data sheet with the child so information could be more effectively exchanged between the school and the home. The parents agreed to chart the data on a graph which would be kept within their home and they also supported the idea of assisting the student with arranging his daily schedule so he could still take part in the activities which he desired while also increasing his overall rates of homework completion.

The analysis of the data revealed some interesting findings. For instance, the researcher found the average baseline level of homework completion for the student to be at ten percent. The implementation of the initial treatment condition produced results in which the student met the 20 percent criterion for five consecutive days. When the criterion was raised to 40 percent in the second phase of treatment, the student's mean completion rate quickly rose to 68 percent. Lastly, when the criterion was raised to 80 percent in the final treatment condition, the student performed at 70 percent on the first day, but met or exceeded the 80 percent criterion for the following eight days (Schloss et al., 1983).

Follow-up data, which was collected four months after the removal of the treatment, pointed out that the student was able to maintain a stable homework completion rate of 80 percent. The researcher then turned to the student and his parents for answers as to why they felt this was such an effective long-lasting intervention. The student and parents explained that the gradual increases in expectations helped to ensure student success. The development of a routine helped the child to complete his homework while also making sure he would not miss out on any highly prized activities,

and the student was internally motivated by the increases in academic achievement as a result of his higher rates of homework completion. After looking back to the results of their study, Schloss et al. (1983) concluded that techniques that progressively shape prosocial behavior do not necessitate the utilization of powerful stimuli or aversive authority. Rather, positive praise and achievement outcomes may be adequate enough in order to generate progressive modifications in overall performance.

Research Summary

Although most, if not all, of the empirical studies have helped to lend credence to the importance of facilitating home-school collaboration to facilitate higher levels of homework completion, each of the studies has limitations and can be further built upon with replications, or variations of the original studies, which take the missing variables into account. For example, the program developed by Olympia et al. (1996) needs to be investigated empirically so that we know the validity of its suggestions and interventions. Rhoades and Kratochwill (1998) mention that their study is limited because of the small sample size of participants. The study also was limited by its investigation of Caucasian subjects from one specific age group. The Strukoff et al. (1987) study was limited by its single subject design, which not only looked into the behaviors of an individual of a single gender, but also an individual of a single social class, ethnicity, and age. Although the Fish and Mendola (1986) study did not incorporate the home into their intervention strategy, it would be entirely possible to involve the parents in the self-instruction methods, design, or practices. These are but a few of many limitations of the scarce research findings in the area of home-school collaboration to help with facilitating higher rates of homework completion for heterogeneous individuals or groups of students.

A strong research contribution to the area of home school collaboration as a means of increasing overall levels of homework completion would include studies that specifically focus upon methods that initiate and sustain home-school partnerships, research on the meanings, methods, and effects of parent involvement, studies that utilize true random assignment of students to treatment conditions, studies that reveal the depth of variability in home environments, studies that explore beneficial conflict-resolution strategies for parents, studies that tap into students' perceived levels of sacrifice for doing homework rather than more preferred activities, studies that expose critical factors in the complex interrelationship between schools, families, and communities, studies that investigate effective ways of working with families from diverse backgrounds or families that have consistently been hard-to-reach, and studies that reveal the minimal number of and specific interventions needed to increase homework completion rates for students in all levels of education.

# CHAPTER 3

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In spite of the pendulum swing associated with the level of importance that society places upon the assigning of homework, homework has been here for many years and will continue to be for many generations to come. Homework will continue to be assigned in varying amounts to children who have both diverse abilities and resources to assist them with this educational requirement. Certain children will continue to struggle with the completion of their homework assignments and will continue to find themselves left behind. Parents will continue to struggle with getting their children to do their homework assignments as well. Therefore, we must continue to search for new and innovative tools and methods to help level the playing field for all children. Home-school collaboration may be one of the most reasonable and effective solutions to this problem. Home-school collaboration can be thought of as an intervention in and of itself, or as a mindset, which brings about a variety of interventions that aid students in completing homework assignments.

Keith (1986) points out that past research on homework has brought about mixed results. Olympia et al. (1994) lend support to these findings by explaining that a wealth of literature points to the minimal volume of well-constructed experimental studies on homework. This dearth of substantial evidence may lead to conflicting findings and countervailing evidence for the effectiveness of homework. One area that needs clarification is the connection between homework and achievement. There is a need to develop a valid and reliable universal measure of the effects of homework on achievement.

Another pedagogical area in need of further research deals with the efficient structuring of homework policies. "Research is needed to help school districts develop homework policies that reflect the concerns of those who are affected, including students, parents, and teachers, and that ensures that policies are subject to ongoing research and revision" (Bryan, Burstein, & Bryan, 2001, p. 178). It is easy to see the importance of effective collaboration between the home and the school if policies are to come from this type of research. Surveys and questionnaires, in addition to face-to-face contacts, may help to gather the necessary information that schools and school districts need in order to refine their policies to meet the needs of the families that they serve. Homework policies have the potential to be extremely powerful if they have been constructed by collaborative teams of parents, students, and educators alike.

As an extension of the idea surrounding the need for additional research involving students' households, McDermott et al., (1984) explained that in order to make more effective decisions about homework and homework practices, additional research is needed that involves both teachers and researchers monitoring the contexts of the homes of schoolchildren. This type of research will lead to a better understanding of family dynamics, may give a first hand look at what families are facing on a daily basis, and may open the doors to further opportunities for communication and collaboration (Doherty & Peskay, 1992). Although many educators think that they have some idea of what students are facing at home on a daily basis, there are many diverse and heterogeneous groupings of families across the world that face various obstacles to school success. For example, many families may explicitly devalue the process of homework completion for a variety of reasons, including parents' own lack of success,

prior difficulties in school, or other familial responsibilities which preclude their children's homework tasks. In order to construct shared relationships between educators and parents, obstacles need to be recognized, accepted, understood, and methodically eliminated. There is a need for further inquiry into the lives of all students combined with the welcoming and devoted attitude of all school personnel.

An additional topic in need of research is teacher training. Bryan et al. (2001) explained that the basis of home-school collaboration, as well as tactics for communication with families, may be completely exempt in teacher-preparation training programs. Many teachers may not be sufficiently trained on how to develop and assign effective homework assignments. Efficient structuring of homework assignments should be a topic that is encompassed more thoroughly in preservice, advanced, and inservice training sessions for both teachers and administrators. Quite frequently, teachers are ill prepared, poorly supervised, and rarely evaluated on their homework plans and operations (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001). If teachers do not have adequate training for assigning quality homework to students, there is little assurance that homework assignments will actually benefit students. Further research on what preservice teachers are learning in universities is needed.

Research on the effectiveness of parent support groups is minimal. Families may benefit from support from other families that are facing some of the same roadblocks to academic success. It may be highly beneficial for parents to be able to witness other family situations that deal with similar difficulties and to know that steady effort expended over a long period of time may assist with ameliorating their children's homework problems (Jenson, Sheridan, Olympia, & Andrews, 1994). Sharing of

techniques and strategies may lead to more success in getting students to complete homework. Parents may be more trusting of other parents when they are sharing ideas and may not feel quite as intimidated or stuck in a subordinate role as they might when talking with professional educators. There is much to be learned from others in the surrounding communities and research may be able to provide further insight into how parents can most effectively work together with one another.

Although Keith (1986) noted that a considerable amount of research has been conducted with high school students, there is still much to be learned about increasing homework completion rates. High school students benefit more academically from completing their homework assignments than both junior high and elementary school students. Research is needed in order to keep up with the current reinforcers that will be most salient and reasonable for high school students who require such rewards as part of their established interventions. Furthermore, current research on after-school programs is limited to studies that focus on younger student populations. However, there is a need to construct and investigate after-school homework programs for older students as well. After-school programs are just one of many interventions that need to be tried out in the context of high schools. Many of the interventions, which have been discussed throughout this paper, should be utilized both in isolation and in combination with one another, in order to see which ones lead to the most advantageous benefits for high school students.

A related area of research in the context of high schools is the effect of parental involvement. Whether parents think that they need to give their children more independence and space at this age or whether they feel less competent in helping out

with the advanced level of homework, there is still a need for parent involvement in high schools (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Jenson et al., 1994; Simon, 2001). Research is needed to address the ways in which parents can assist their children with their homework and academic achievement at each and every level of their school careers. There are a considerable number of studies that lend credence to the positive benefits of parental participation in the education of children. Both home-school collaboration and significant parental participation seem to be valuable benefits for students, parents, teachers, and schools (Christenson, Rounds, & Franklin, 1992). Therefore, it can be concluded that parental involvement, even at the high school level, can be of great importance to all individuals involved.

After conducting a thorough review of the relevant literature, it has become more evident that there are many varied tactics and interventions which have been utilized throughout the years to help students complete their homework. It is inevitable that there will continue to be discoveries of additional techniques that can be utilized in homes and schools across the nation. Many of these techniques will be simple refinements and alterations of the interventions which have already been used. There are also bound to be some innovative and creative techniques that result from additional research, advanced technology, and the simple changing of the times as we progress into future decades. However, we must keep in mind that it is highly unlikely that a fundamental, overarching discovery about homework that is relevant to all students is destined to be made (Cooper & Valentine, 2001). We, as educators and researchers, must be open to the idea that it may take multiple trials and extreme patience with each and every child and family if we are ever to be able to come to any resolution to this existing educational problem.

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